

The Segregated Holiday

By Shirley M. Haws

There are all kinds of holidays, but the one called deer hunting is the most segregated of any; it is unequivocally for the pleasure of men, and for the exertion of women. To illustrate, I'd like to tell you the inside story of the hunting season at our house.

It started sometime in August and from then on Knollin, my husband, could talk of nothing else. By the end of September he knew exactly where he'd go, what he'd eat, who he'd go with, when he'd leave, how many bullets he'd take, and had cleaned his gun three times. During this time I didn't mind much, because it looks like, for the first time in six years, things would turn out so I could go too.

The first part of September, Knollin decided he didn't like the campsite he had chosen after all, and we spent the next two Saturdays hunting for another. Each time he'd locate a promising one, he'd say, "Now are you sure? I want you to be happy with it, because you're going with me this year." Up to now this holiday hadn't been so bad. I love to take fall rides in the mountains.

From the first of October until the week before opening day, Knollin spent every spare minute preparing for the hunt. Then on Tuesday before the opening day, Knollin and our two older boys, John age thirteen, and David, age ten, casually sauntered up to me, with every muscle in their faces showing that they had something derogatory on their minds. Knollin spoke first and asked me if I still planned to go hunting. I said I did, and he said, "You know, if you go, John has to stay home. He has his paper route, and there'll be no one around to take it." John almost whispered, in a voice that had a hint of a tear, "That all right Dad, I'll stay home." What mother could resist? I consented to stay home and take the papers. As they retreated, I'm sure I noticed a victorious lilt to their walk.

Wednesday was a busy day. Knollin went to work, and I stayed home and

cleaned the trailer house, washed and ironed their red clothes, and made cookies, cake, and chile for them to take. Knollin came home from work and cleaned the gun.

Thursday morning Knollin woke the family at 5:30 A.M. for last minute instructions. “Now I want everything ready tonight so we can leave first thing in the morning, he kept saying. “You know it’s going to take all day to set up camp.” Knollin went to his job, the boys went to school, and I went to work. I bought groceries, packed everything into the trailer, did some more cooking, and ran several errands for each of the “manfolk”, who were going hunting, and were too busy to do anything themselves. When Knollin got home, he cleaned his gun.

The day before the big hunt dawned at the Haws household, the hunters arose bright and early, anxious to get underway. As we were eating breakfast, the fire siren rang, and since Knollin is a member of the volunteer fire department, he was obliged to answer the call. As it turned out, it was an all day job dousing the fire and cleaning up after. Now they finally got underway, it was dark, my house was a shambles, and my nerves were shot.

Saturday, I thought would be quiet and restful with the men gone. How wrong I was! My six year old daughter had a birthday party to go to, and also her dancing lessons, and there was ramshackled house to clean. It seemed that before I could turn around it was time to deliver John’s papers. As I took Tuff, the barber, his paper, what should greet me, but a stuffed deer in the barber’s chair, all prepared for a shave, with a sign hung around its neck, and I quote, “Today’s my turn, come back Monday.” Even the barber had this crazy buck fever!

I had just returned from delivering the papers, when the telephone rang. Marie, a friend of mine, whose husband owns a service station, was in a pinch. The man who worked at the station on the afternoon shift had gone hunting, and didn’t show up for work. She had to work at the station and could I watch her children. That took care of the afternoon.

I had just gotten home from my babysitting job when the door flew open, and there were my hunters. John and David couldn't talk fast enough to tell me how their dad had a "saved their lives" by having them duck down behind a rock while some far off hunter mistook them for a deer. In dragged Knollin, so tired he could hardly put one foot in front of the other. He had climbed all over the mountain. Could I please unpack and clean the trailer house? He was going straight to bed as soon as he cleaned his gun.

So in quiet resignation, I listened to the story of Daddy, the hero, and felt sorry for poor mother-overworked, overtired and underrated. But not for long, after all, I had a trailer to unpack and clean, and a lot of sympathy to give. My "dears" didn't even see a "deer".